

Washington - Congresswoman Linda Sánchez, a member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, issued the following statement on her decision to vote in support of the “U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans’ Health, and Iraq Accountability Act.” The bill passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 218-212.

“I voted today in favor of the Congressional funding plan to support our troops and bring an end to our country’s involvement in the war in Iraq. While I would have preferred a bill to bring our troops home sooner, this plan provides the best alternative for ending the Bush Administration’s open-ended commitment to a failed strategy and for taking care of those who have served our country in the line of duty.

“This bill answers the call that the American people made last November for a new direction in Iraq. Our bill requires that the redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq begin by March 1, 2008 - or even sooner should the Iraqi government fail to take responsibility for improving its own security. The bill requires American troops to be out of harm's way in Iraq by August 1, 2008.

“We are increasing President Bush’s proposed budget for providing health care for current troops and returning veterans by \$3.5 billion. We add funding so that our armed forces at home, stretched too thin now, will be ready for unforeseen threats. We are making sure that the troops in Afghanistan, the longtime base of Al Qaeda, have the resources they need to complete the job that the Administration seems to have forgotten.

“We are requiring accountability by instituting - and not just talking about - benchmarks that the Bush Administration developed for the performance of the Iraqi government.

“This has been the most difficult vote I’ve had to make in Congress. I have talked with families at home who have lost loved ones in Iraq, and I have gone to Walter Reed Army Medical Center to visit wounded troops. These individuals and families have paid the price for a failed strategy that attempts to impose a military solution on a political problem.

“I truly believe that this war is immoral. I believe we should get the brave women and men of our armed forces out of the middle of an Iraqi civil war. They should not continue to pay the price for poor planning and poor decision-making by the White House.

“After careful consideration, I realized that this Congressional plan is the strongest, most realistic option for changing the failed strategy in Iraq. I wish this bill were not necessary, but after four years of immeasurable losses in Iraq and misinformation from the Bush Administration, Congress had to act.

“President Bush ignored the message of voters last November. I hope that he is listening today to this message: there are no more blank checks for this war.”